

Business Boot Camp Kicks Butt (article in Colfax Record 4/2/09)

Embedded reporter survives basic training
Tom Durkin



Courtesy

Colfax Lions Club member Paul Houck, right, receives his commission from Business Boot Camp Commandant Brent Smith, CEO of Sierra Economic Corp. Houck participated in last week's three-day basic training program for small business owners. He owns and operates a direct-mail business in Grass Valley.

The Nevada City Business Boot Camp commissioned more than two dozen recruits last week, including me.

We spent three intense days in the Nevada City council chambers getting basic training in how to create, fund and run a small business.

Commandant Brent Smith, CEO of Sierra Economic Corp. (as well as a Retired U.S. Army Lt. Colonel) kicked off the boot camp with a stern warning that the next three days would be jammed with tough information, hard work, lots of homework, good food, and maybe a little fun.

It was a free (lunch and dinner included) crash course in small business: from start-up to retirement. After three days, we all were dazed with information overload. We were tired out, but fired up.

From 0800 to 2000 (8 a.m. to 8 p.m.) Tuesday and Wednesday, and 0800 to 1700 (5 p.m.) Thursday, 14 BIs (business instructors) drilled us in everything from self-assessment (do you have what it takes?) to double entry and accrual bookkeeping to financial feasibility analysis to vision/mission statements to high-tech marketing strategies to (of course) business plans to how to get loans (SED Corp. itself is a non-profit lender) to retirement and sell-off options.

Some enlistees were established business people who were looking to take it to the next level; some were pre-launch start-ups, and some, like me, were dealing with the fact there are no jobs out there.

I was amazed and charmed by the fascinating variety of vital people who either wanted to — or had to — go into business for themselves. Or with each other.

Although the intent of the boot camp was to train us, the agenda was to network us. We just naturally began to form strategic alliances as we discovered each other had skills or services we needed.

I met at least three people who might contract with me to write Web site content. One of the BIs invited me to submit writing samples to his company. I was passing my business cards out like candy.

What impressed – and frankly – surprised me most was how so many of my comrades-in-arms listed commitment to community as a core value in their vision statements. It wasn't so much about how much money we could make.

For most of us, it was more about how to make a decent living serving the greater good doing what we love. We had several green business ventures. Others intended to donate portions of profits to charity.

Of course, we all wanted to make money, but there was a noticeable absence of greed as a prime motivator. Nevertheless, the bottom line rules: Business is, after all, about money. That's where loans and lines of credit come in handy – if you have a business plan that convinces the lender you can repay the debt.

The good news is that SED Corp. works with Citizens Bank (Grass Valley, Auburn, Truckee) to offer various loan packages as low as \$5,000 on up to six figures. Some loans require that you use the money to create at least one job. More good news: that can be your own job. So, do I want to go into business for myself? No. I'd rather have a decent job, maybe working for somebody I met in boot camp. But the reality is, until (or if) I find a decent job, I am, in effect, in business whether I like it or not. After all, I'm getting paid to write this article.

Therefore, business camp, for me, gave me an invaluable backup plan. If I have to survive as a freelance writer, I at least learned how to make a better living at it.

Upcoming Biz boot camps : April 28-30 in Plumas County and May 26-28 in Sierra County

* To enlist, call SED Corp. at 823-4703 or send email to info@sedcorp.biz.